

**Rhode Island Department of Education  
and  
Newport Public Schools**

**Face-to-Face Meetings Report**

Thursday, March 21 and Friday, March 22, 2002

**Overview**

Two “Face-to-Face” meetings between the Newport school district and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) occurred on March 21 and March 22, 2002. These meetings were scheduled as a result of five schools being identified as “Low Performing,” based upon four years of student assessment data. The “Face-to-Face” meeting is the first step in an ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. The meetings are designed to allow school districts targeted for Progressive Support & Intervention to address their capacity to engage in the four elements of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English Language arts and mathematics over the following year.

**Elementary Schools; Thursday, March 21, 2002**

**Schools:** Carey School, Dr. M. H. Sullivan School, Sheffield School

**Attending from Newport:** Mary Canole, Superintendent; David Gordon, School Committee Chair; Robert Power, Assistant Superintendent; Judith Droitcour, Director of Teaching, Learning and Professional Development; Maria Van Anglen, Sullivan School Principal; Mercedes Mellekas, Sullivan School Teacher, School Improvement Team; Jennifer Borman, LAB at Brown University; Thomas Milburn, Sullivan School Teacher and Union Representative; Leland Brown, Sheffield School Principal; Karen Day, Sheffield School, School Improvement Team Representative; June McGreavy, Sheffield School Teacher, School Improvement Team and Union Representative; Kathy Owens, Carey School teacher; David Koietsogiance, Carey School Teacher; Taymond Gimes, Carey School PTO and School Improvement Team; Jeanne Napolitano, Newport City Council; Cynthis Murrell, Carey School Principal; Jo Eva Gaines, Newport School Committee.

**RIDE Staff:** David V. Abbott, Interim Assistant Commissioner; Elliot Krieger, Media Relations; Marvin Abney, Special Assistant for Finance/Progressive Support and Intervention; Cynthia Corbridge, Office of Assessment; George

McDonough, Office of Integrated Social Services; Elizabeth Hyman, Office of Assessment; Carol Beatrice, Reading Fellow, Office of Instruction; Linda Jzyk, High School Reform Specialist; Barbara Burgess, Office of Integrated Social Services.

### **RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation**

Interim Assistant Commissioner David V. Abbott welcomed the group, and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting. The school district was asked to begin with a presentation on the status of school and district efforts to improve student achievement in English/Language Arts and mathematics. RIDE staff then responded to the school district's presentation, and added comments based upon data analysis performed prior to the meeting. District and school officials next described future plans to add or modify action plans to improve teaching and learning, and identified existing or prospective barriers to implementation. The meeting concluded with shared expectations of the respective roles of the school, school district, and RIDE in supporting ongoing school improvement efforts. Commissioner Abbott concluded by noting that the meeting would result in a report to be made public at an upcoming meeting of the Newport School Committee.

### **School District Presentation – Elementary Schools**

Representatives from Newport were given the opportunity to respond to the school performance category designation as it applies to their district. Mary Canole, Superintendent of Newport Schools, stated that Newport was not surprised by the school category designation, as the schools had previously completed a self-assessment. Newport was not coming to this meeting on the defensive but was instead putting its collective energy toward improving student achievement. The Superintendent described the many efforts instituted since 1998 to address student achievement.

#### ***District school improvement efforts***

According to Superintendent Canole, district-wide strategies to support school improvement include: implementing the Aspiring Principals Program; supporting National Board Certification and a new teacher mentoring program; providing extensive professional development to schools with three days added to contract; providing reading coaches for elementary schools; monitoring student achievement through balanced literacy, math investigations and CIM; focusing on classroom learning at all levels of district hierarchy, including participation in University of Pittsburgh Principals of Learning and professional development for all administrators; and, implementing instructional strategies including the Early Start Reading Program, Grades 6 and 9 Ramp up cluster and double periods for literacy and math, all day kindergarten, and summer/after school programs

targeting literacy and math. In addition, the district will utilize research-based programs and set up a system of ongoing assessment and data collection, as well as focus on looking at student work to improve teaching.

Bob Power, Assistant Superintendent, described the role of the Family Service Coordinators in the schools, and stated that parent involvement had increased significantly as a result of these coordinators. Judy Droitcour, Director of Teaching, Learning and Professional Development added that students need additional time or extended learning with viable interventions in place, along with parent support to send students to these interventions.

The principal of **Sullivan School**, Maria Van Anglen, stated that her school had a number of resources and programs, but lacked focus. The school is involved in Brown University's "Core School Partnership" to increase its focus on literacy and mathematics, and to support the school in moving toward "expert instruction" across all the grades. Through a self-assessment process, the school has discovered that they are not focusing on the "right work" to help students achieve. The school has a goal to raise test scores by 10% in the next year.

The principal of **Carey School**, Cynthia Murrell, described the school as having a goal of making academics more rigorous. The school needs more ELA coaches, would like testing at all levels, and needs help in working with students that have behavioral issues. Teachers from Carey School stated that they need assistance for their school, such as supportive after-school and mentoring programs, as well as resources for children with behavioral issues.

The principal of **Sheffield School**, Leland Brown, described the school as having strengths in parent participation. They need to target critical reading and writing with uninterrupted blocks of literacy time, and intend to use the library to foster opportunities for learning. In addition, they plan to improve teaching strategies by examining student work.

### ***Professional development efforts***

David Gordon, Chair of the School Committee, stated that he has respect for the schools in Newport and supports a "structural change in the schools". However, in order for this change to happen, resources must get down to the teacher level. He expressed the lack of professional development offered through RIDE and recommended the modification of certification standards to encourage post-retirement and mid-career job applicants.

Judy Droitcour stated that the schools want coaches, but there are insufficient resources to provide them in all the schools. She also emphasized the need to increase expertise in core content areas.

Jo Eva Gaines, Newport School Committee member, mentioned that Newport has many seasoned teachers leaving in the next five years, and suggested that

Newport could bring these teachers back as coaches and facilitators. Assistant Commissioner Abbott supported that idea, but mentioned that work would have to be done with the state Retirement Board because current legislation allows retired teachers to teach in the classroom, but not serve in other roles such as coaches.

Jeanne Napolitano, Newport City Council member stated that there is a problem in Newport with students leaving the public schools to attend private school. Newport has the highest percentage of students attending private schools.

There was a discussion of additional complex issues in Newport that impact student performance; high levels of mobility; ESL student testing; and high percentages of students in special education programs. Finally, the district identified the following barriers to achieving school reform: inability to attract school leaders; lack of professional development time; weak instructional accountability; the need for central office administration and principals to grow into new roles of instructional leadership; lack of instructional time for students; lack of consistency and articulation across schools/grade levels; weak evaluation system, and, above all, lack of adequate fiscal resources.

### **RIDE Analysis – Elementary Schools**

The inter-disciplinary team from RIDE made a series of observations based on its review of planning documents, assessment data, SALT survey results, SPED School Support visit, NEASC information, and direct observation:

- There are disturbing equity gaps between the performance of minority and white students;
- Building-based school improvement planning appears weak, disjointed and lacking in sufficient community involvement;
- Ongoing development and recruitment of school leaders appears hampered in part by low salary structure;
- Elementary schools lack a comprehensive approach to managing student behavior;
- Consistent reports of unruly and disengaged students may be an indicator of a lack of adequate academic rigor;
- There appears to be no ongoing attempt to assess how well standards-based teaching has been adopted across classrooms;
- The recently aggressive approach to early childhood initiatives is a positive force;
- Student support activities such as the Human resources Mall at Thompson Middle School is working well, but should be further integrated;
- New federal monies that could support teacher quality initiatives are available and should be investigated;

- The focus on student achievement must be increased in order to facilitate prioritization of time and money; and
- There must be a greater focus on an infrastructure to support larger scale interventions and avoid a “Band-aid” approach to improving student achievement.

### **RIDE/District Agreement**

Superintendent Canole and Assistant Commissioner Abbott identified the following immediate strategies to improve Newport’s low performing elementary schools:

- Continue the focus on balanced literacy and *Investigative Mathematics*;
- Develop common strategies to identify and support transitory students;
- Expand on the “Principles of Learning” initiative and develop a way to get TAN involved;
- Find resources to expand number of instructional coaches;
- Increase support and professional development for standards-driven leadership for building administrators;
- Develop additional instructional and tutorial time;
- Develop infrastructure to support school improvement activities, both in central office and the schools;
- Develop a strategic approach to working with students with behavior issues;
- Create and support a local system of ongoing assessment, data collection and analysis to drive instructional reform efforts; and
- Increase accountability for instructional practices and reform efforts.

**Secondary Schools**  
**Friday, March 22, 2002**

**Schools:** Newport Area Career & Technical School, Rogers High School, Frank E. Thompson Middle School

**Attending from Newport:** Mary Canole, Superintendent; David Gordon, School Committee Chair; Robert Power, Assistant Superintendent; Judith Droitcour, Director of Teaching, Learning and Professional Development; Linda Martin, Director of Special Education; Joseph Martins, Director, Newport Tech Center; Stephanie Martland, Teacher NACTC; Jane Regan, Principal, Thompson Middle School; Suzanne Bessin, Teacher, Thompson Middle School; Laurie Sullivan, Language Arts Teacher and Coordinator, School Improvement Team, Thompson Middle School; Victoria Johnson, Principal, Rogers High School; Tia Seigulinshy, Rogers High School; Richard Fullerton, Rogers High School.

**RIDE Staff:** David Abbott, Interim Assistant Commissioner; Marvin Abney, Sp. Assistant for Finance/Progressive Support and Intervention; Cynthia Corbridge, Office of Assessment; Elizabeth Hyman, Office of Assessment; Richard Latham, Office of School Improvement; Ken Fish, Director, Office of School Improvement; Carol Beatrice, Reading Fellow, Office of Instruction; Barbara Burgess, Office of Integrated Social Services.

**RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation**

Interim Assistant Commissioner, David Abbott, welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting, as outlined above.

**School District Presentation – Secondary Schools**

Superintendent Canole began her remarks by reiterating that Newport was not surprised, and did not dispute, that its secondary schools were low performing. The Superintendent described the District Plan as strong, with a collaborative approach to decision making, but acknowledged that improvement planning at the school level was relatively weak. She observed that individual schools need support, empowerment and training to make their school improvement teams effective. The Superintendent would like to expand the University of Pittsburgh “Principles of Learning” beyond administrators to teachers. Through the current union contract, three additional professional development days were added to the school year. These days were used to focus on standards-based practices. It is a challenge in Newport to continue these additional days because of funding issues.

Judy Droitcour, Director of Teaching, Learning and Professional Development, described the Thompson Middle School as having a culture change towards participation in professional development. While Science and Social Studies Departments have made positive changes, the lack of certified math teachers undercuts implementation of a new mathematics program. A request was made to facilitate an alternate certification for experienced individuals, such as retiring instructors from the Naval College. Both middle and high school teachers would like coaches for reading and math, but it is difficult to find experienced leadership to fill those positions. Judy went on to state that Rogers High School was putting action to their NEASC plan, and was looking at student work.

Linda Martin, Special Education Director, described issues relating to special education in Newport. There are high numbers of students receiving special education; 27% – 28%. There are a number of out of district placements, particularly at Bradley. Newport would like to start to bring these students back into the community; however, there is an issue regarding lack of space. There is a need for positive behavioral support programs for children in preschool through high school. There is an issue with special education children not participating in the state performance testing, particularly at the high school. Some of these students are in crisis placements such as the Training School or Bradley at the time of testing. Newport needs to develop an Alternative Placement Program in Newport for students who are suspended.

Bob Power, Assistant Superintendent, described the Newport Partnership as an organization of 32 partners that has leveraged over \$10 million dollars. At Thompson Middle School, there is the Human Services Mall that provides wrap-around services for students. Newport Hospital funds the staff. An after school program is now being developed through funds from United Way. At Rogers High School, there is a Student Activity Center that is connected to many community agencies. Staffing for the Center is provided by these agencies.

David Gordon, Chair of the Newport School Committee, stated that the school committee is refocusing on instruction for student improvement. He is optimistic about the administration and teachers as a whole, and sees professional development as key to supporting teachers. He also concurred with teachers that behavioral issues in the classrooms get in the way of teaching.

Joe Martin, Director of the **Newport Career and Tech Center**, described an increased emphasis on academics, with a link of the academic program to the curriculum at Rogers High School. The school's strategies to improve student performance include math and ELA coaches working directly with students. Professional development is offered to support the integration of academic standards into Career & Tech classes.

Jane Regan, Principal of **Thompson Middle School**, explained that for the past two years, the school has been split across four locations during building

reconstruction. In spite of this disruption, the school has moved forward with developing new strategies for school improvement. All sixth grade students will have a double block of literacy instruction. There is professional development for teachers in teaching writing and balanced literacy. Ideally, the school would like balanced literacy training for all teachers; however, barriers such as time and money impede that goal. There is a reading program for all grades, and a plan for a summer reading program. There will be a ramp-up cluster for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who have not met the standards, designed with small classes and a focus on literacy and math. There will be common planning time for teachers when the school goes to a 6-day schedule.

Victoria Johnson, principal of **Rogers High School**, described the current Newport School District as more collaborative, from kindergarten to high school. She described many teachers as passionate about their work. She explained a five-year battle with Assistant principal turnover at Rogers. In response to this leadership void, a team of existing teachers has been developed to focus on school improvement. This leadership team has developed a core of learning expectations. The School Improvement Team has folded recommendations from NEASC into the school improvement plan. The school is adopting America's Choice and Skills Commission initiatives. They do not have a Special Education Department Chair.

Teachers at Rogers High School, Tia Seigulinshy and Richard Fullerton, provided information on strategies that are being put in place at the school. Building capacity toward school improvement is increasing through professional development and an integrated approach to instruction. Rubrics are being developed for writing using the English language arts standards. The social studies curriculum is being aligned between the middle and high school. They are developing a ramp-up program for 40 students, using the America's Choice School curriculum. This program will offer double periods of instruction in ELA and math, and one period of social studies and science. Students will be eligible if they are two or more grades below grade-level. The math program will be upgraded, and the teachers will be looking at student work as a way to revise and improve curriculum.

### **RIDE Analysis – Secondary Schools**

The inter-disciplinary team from RIDE made a series of observations based on its review of planning documents, assessment data, SALT survey results, SPED School Support visit, NEASC information, and direct observation:

- There are disturbing equity gaps between the performance of minority and white students;
- Consistent reports of unruly and disengaged students might be an indicator of a lack of adequate academic rigor;



- There appears to be no ongoing attempt to assess how well standards-based teaching has been adopted across classrooms;
- SPED appears overly dependent on out-of-district placements, and does not appear to have a viable plan to address these students' needs within the district;
- The recently aggressive approach to early childhood initiatives is a positive force;
- Student support activities such as the Human resources Mall at Thompson Middle School are working well but should be further integrated;
- New federal monies that could support teacher quality initiatives are available and should be investigated;
- The focus on student achievement must be increased in order to facilitate prioritization of time and money; and
- There must be a greater focus on an infrastructure to support larger scale interventions and avoid a "Band-aid" approach to improving student achievement.

Assistant Commissioner David Abbott further challenged the secondary schools, referencing the large number of students performing poorly on the state assessments. He questioned why the school was focusing on piloting programs for so few students, when so many were in need of assistance. He concluded by asking the high school to develop a plan to bolster instruction in the core academic areas to students currently enrolled in the school.

Superintendent Canole responded by saying that there is not a mechanism of accountability in the high school. In the elementary schools there are grade assessments in writing, etc. There are none in the high school. There are a lot of small steps being taking in the high school. The elementary schools are more progressive. She expressed a concern that contractual issues might present barriers to needed reforms.

Assistant Commissioner Abbott suggested that stronger community ownership in schools through an increased focus on building effective school improvement teams would likely reduce other barriers to improvement. He also suggested the development of an ongoing forum to discuss these issues related to contract language.

### **RIDE/District Agreement**

Superintendent Canole and Assistant Commissioner Abbott identified the following immediate strategies to improve Newport's low performing elementary schools:

- Newport needs a strategic approach to confront issues regarding student behavior;
- Newport needs to address significant equity gaps in test scores through a district-wide initiative to support low-performing students;
- The High School needs to move away from piloting programs and think about immediate reforms that will benefit all students;
- The district needs to have someone accountable at the district level to oversee school improvement efforts as part of an increased focus on building an infrastructure to support ongoing reform;
- Develop a strategic approach to working with students with behavior issues;
- Develop an Alternative Placement Program for students on suspension or otherwise at risk;
- Develop a plan to bolster instruction in the core academic areas to all students currently enrolled in the high school;
- Create and support a local system of ongoing assessment and data collection and analysis to drive instructional reform efforts; and
- Increase accountability for instructional practices and reform efforts.

It was further agreed that all parties would work together towards the betterment of the Newport School District and that initial agreements brought forth at the "face-to-face" meetings would be reflected in the district's May 1 submission to RIDE. As such, included and emphasized in the District Strategic Plan and applicable School Improvement Plans are the district's approaches to improve achievement in Mathematics and English language arts and its strategies for addressing equity gaps.